291 the steppes of Central Asia at the command of the Empress Catherine of Russia during the second half of the eighteenth century, the nomad Turkic peoples at one time did not make their clothing of textile materials, but rather of leather prepared from horses' hides. This was the only material strong enough to withstand the ravages of the sandstorms and blizzards which sweep across the vast steppes. In the dress of the Kirghiz Kasaks this tradition still survives. Over their cotton trousers they wear others of leather, which are of very loose cut. The upper part of the body is covered with a coarse shirt, over which the wide, long-sleeved coat, known throughout Central Asia as the chalat, is worn. The chalats of the nomads are often thickly padded and quilted, and are, therefore, very warm. In former times they, too, were made of leather, and in very rare cases they still are. As a protection against cold winter weather coats of sheep or wolf skin are also worn.

Among the Kirghiz the types of headgear are particularly numerous, the traditional ones also being of leather. In the North a species of helmet is worn; it has four flaps which are let down in such a manner as to cover the face almost completely when a snowstorm is raging. Such helmets are made of strong leather, and are usually red in colour. The Kirghiz also wear high fur caps, with the hair to the inside. Only the turned-up flaps show a strip of fur.

[287] A textile material which is particularly characteristic of the Mongol tribes of Northern Asia is felt (see ill. page 1460). The Kirghiz,

[See cat. 116, p 75 - Analyst]

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4:Leix U-5 (no date)1941 RL1 Turkestan RL1

Felted and Knotted Fabrics in Turkestan

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Whereas settled peoples usually prefer stable and rigid materials for building their houses, nomads require a material which is light and unbreakable, which can easily be loaded on to the backs of their camels or other beasts of burden, and thus transported from place to place. For that reason nomads tend to develop textile techniques of distinctive character. It is in this respect that the fundamental difference between Kirghiz and Turkomans finds its most notable expression. The Kirghiz, who prefers stout, serviceable, and plain materials, makes use of felt manufactured by a most primitive method, whereas the Turkomans have adopted the same complicated technique of knotting which is used in the making of pile carpets, and which permits of such rich and varied effects.

In this respect as in many others the Kirghiz perpetuate an ancient technique of the Mongol nomads of Inner Asia. Fabrics of felt with elaborate appliqué patterns have been found in the tombs of Noin Ula in Mongolia, which date from about the beginning of the Christian era (see Ciba Review No. 37, p. 1322).

Felt is made of wool, usually of the summer wool of lambs born the same year. The process of converting loose wool into a thick, strong,

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287 yet at the same time pliable material consists of several stages. First of all the wool is spread out on the ground in a thick layer, where it is vigorously beaten with rods, a task performed by women and girls. It is then placed on a straw mat, also in an even layer, and sprayed with hot water in order to make it pliable. After that the mass is rolled up in the mat, and this roll is moved to and fro for hours until the wool has become felted. In Eastern Turkestan the Kirghiz make their yak oxen drag the roll back and forward. The felt is of the same colour as the natural wool, that is to say, white, brown, or fawn. White felt is regarded as the
[531] best of all. Patterned rugs are made by cutting out pieces of felt of contrasting colours, and arranging them on the layer of wool as desired. They are then stamped and pressed in until the whole mass becomes firmly felted together. In Western Turkestan the Kirghiz prefer angular geometrical patterns, in Eastern Turkestan undulating ribbon-like lines are more usual (see ill. p. 1460).

342 The felt made in the manner described above is so strong that the Kirghiz and other nomad peoples of Asia use it as a material for making tents; these are called alajak by the Kirghiz, kibitka in Russian, and yurt in Turk-

[See p. 75--Analyst]

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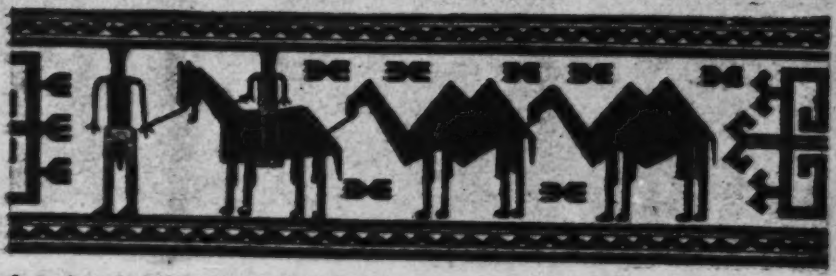

Section of a tent band (dasn-i-khirgah) which the Turkomans wrap round their tents. The pattern shows a caravan executed in the knot-technique.

342 ish. The Kirghiz tent may be described as a portable house (see ill. p. 1457). The frame consists of three parts, the walls, which are made of trellissed laths that can easily be folded up, the roof-frame, and a ring to which wall-frame and roof-frame are secured. The whole structure can be taken to pieces in a very short time, transported by a camel to a fresh pasture, and re-erected without great difficulty. After the framework has been set up, it is first surrounded by mats made of reeds, which bear a pattern formed by wrapping coloured threads round the stalks. These bold patterns with their angular geometrical figures are visible from afar. According to the time of the year the roof or the whole kibitka is covered with felt, which is tied down by means of cords. Against the burning heat of summer as well as the icy winter blizzards the felt kibitka affords the best protection imaginable.

287 531 Tents of similar kind are used by the Turkoman nomads. Unlike those of the Kirghiz, where the materials consist mainly of felt and leather, the Turkoman tents are characterized by the predominance of fabrics worked according to the technique of carpet-knotting.

[184] The perfection of this technique and the great variety of articles produced demonstrate the advanced stage of Turkoman civilization as compared with that of the Kirghiz. The knot-technique gives to the tent as well as to articles of daily use an artistic character which in no way impairs the mobility of the household.

Most of the rectangular Turkoman rugs were hung in the opening of the tents, where they served as substitutes for doors. None of the older pieces are larger than the moderately wide tent-openings. Some Turkoman tribes fixed a specially decorative piece, also worked in the knot-technique, above the entrance. The

7 [See p 67--Analyst]

287 finest examples of this kind are those made by the Yomuds; they are pentagonal in shape, 531 and are ornamented with long black fringes. From the point of view of ethnology the most interesting fabric of this kind is a strip about forty or forty-five feet long and not more than about fourteen inches wide. Such strips are called daur-i-khirgah, and are passed right round the tent. They are covered with pictorial scenes or patterns made up of conventionalized landscapes or trees, all worked on a white ground according to the knot-technique. The figural scenes show caravans on the march, laden and grazing camels, horsemen, and other scenes from the daily life of the Turkomans. It is possible that certain events from the history of the tribe or clan are represented there. Religious or magic elements may also be discerned in these friezes. Essentially similar figures are found among primitive or semi-civilized peoples all over the world, executed in the style predominant in the respective areas.

531 In the tent of the Turkomans, as in the 352 dwellings of all Islamic peoples, the floor-carpet is one of the most important items. It is very likely that the Turkomans made no distinction between ordinary rugs and prayer mats, as their carpets had no pictorial patterns, and did not, therefore, run counter to Islamic law. One very common type of rug, patterned, strangely enough, with almost cruciform figures and claw-shaped ornaments interspersed with them, certainly served both as a floor-covering and a prayer-mat. Pillows and cushions on which the Turkoman rests his arms when seated are never made in knot-technique, but always covered with cloth.

415 The fronts of the various bags and pouches which the Turkomans use as receptacles for everything, even for butter and cheese, are al-

415 ways knotted like carpets (see ill. p. 1461). Of these there are three principal kinds, the juval, a large camel-bag about five feet long and three feet wide, the somewhat smaller torba, and the karjin, which is carried on donkey-back. Whereas the juval and the torba, which are slung on either side of the camel, are always made in pairs, the karjin is a double pouch which is flung over the donkey's back, so that a bag hangs down on either side. These various receptacles, which take the place of cupboards or boxes, and which are used both on the march and in camp, may justly be described as textile furniture, no less so than the floor-carpet which serves the Islamic peoples both as a
531 seat and as a bed. Turkoman carpets are
287 distinguished from all others by their simple
186 but vigorous beauty. All their patterns are geometrical, pictorial designs do not occur.
352 The elements of the patterns are grouped in straight lines and at angles. Curves and circles are entirely foreign to the Turkoman style. Red, the favourite colour for women's dress, is also predominant in the carpets. All other colours are no more than accessories to red, the shade of which varies from deep purple to scarlet.

This uniformity is not only the result of a peculiar sense of style, but is also to be ex-

[Cat. 116, p. 78 -- Analyst]

The characteristic design preferred by the Salor Turkomans for their textile fabrics.

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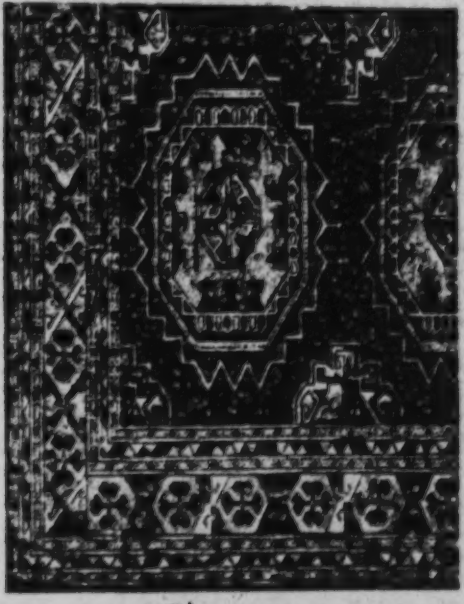

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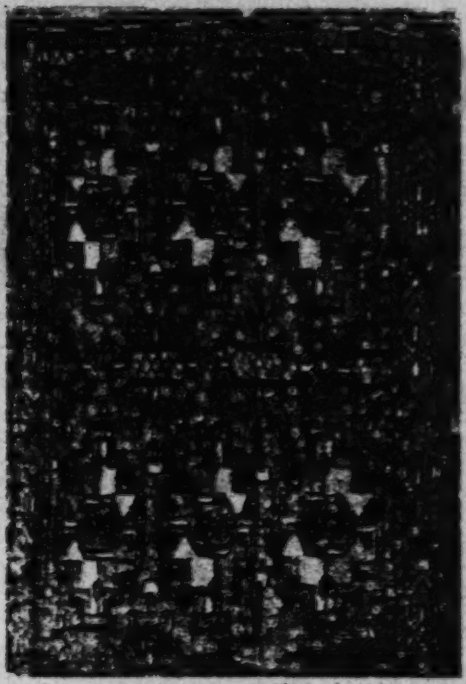

The jagged octagon, the figure found on all knotted work of the Tekke Turkomans.

287 plained by the strongly developed organiza-
531 tion of the Turkoman peoples. It is based on
186 a long tradition which is strictly observed. There are only a limited number of patterns for knotted work, each of which is the property and the distinctive badge of a certain tribe. The scope for variation is very limited, and deliberate artistic innovations do not occur. The probable reason for this is the fact that the Turkomans take a pride in proclaiming their membership of a certain tribe from afar, by the patterns of their camel-pouches when on the march, and by those of their tent-flaps when in camp. In principle this custom is not unlike that of the Scottish Highlanders to proclaim to which clan they belong by displaying its tartan in kilt and plaid.

287 In Europe Turkoman carpets—and the
531 fronts of the camel-bags, which are sold separ-
352 ately as rugs—usually go under the name of Bokhara, though not one of them was ever knotted there. In Bokhara a variation of a Persian design was used for ornamenting carpets. The name for Turkoman carpets current in the Indian carpet-trade indicates the region of Merv as their place of origin. That is correct

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in so far as the best known kinds are made by the women of the Tekke Turkomans, whose pastures are in the Merv area. Incidentally, all Turkoman carpets are made exclusively by women. Typical of the rugs of Merv is an octagonal star which is checkered red and white; the octagon is divided into four parts, each of which is in a colour contrasting to that of the adjacent part. The figures which fill the octagon are very simple and severely geometrical in style. The octagons are dispersed over the surface in even rows (see ill. p. 1459). The rugs of the Tekkes found their way to the West in large quantities; they are very popular, and have often been imitated.

The women of the Saryk tribe, which lives southward from Merv to the Afghan frontier, also use octagons as patterns, and arrange them in a manner similar to that of the Tekke rugs. There is, however, a difference in so far as the edges of these figures are not jagged. The rugs made in the southermost part of this area, known as Punjdeh (five towns), have a style of their own. They avoid red altogether, and are distinguished by a very finely graded scale of colours, in which brown and black predominate, yellow and white being used very sparingly. These dark colours form a marked contrast to the brilliant tints of all other Turkoman rugs. They correspond to the natural colour of the wool or hair used in making all Turkoman rugs. And even though these colours are often obtained artificially by dyeing, the origin of the colour scheme is doubt-

[See p. 72--Analyst]

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less to be sought in the use of undyed wool. The western neighbours of the Saryks are the Salors. They, too, use the octagon as the sole ornament of their knotted rugs; it is filled with hook-shaped figures on an undivided ground of even red (see ill. page 1459).

Of entirely different pattern are the rugs of the northermost Turkoman tribe, the Yomuds. They prefer scalloped figures and rows of hooks. Instead of octagons, lozenges form the ground of their rugs (see ill. page 1461).

In addition to these principal motives a number of minor ones are used, none of which are, however, of importance for the distinction of the various kinds of Turkoman rugs. Attempts have been made on more than one occasion to put some symbolic interpretation on these figures. That may be justified to a certain extent, but there can be no doubt that for some centuries at least the Turkomans have been as unconscious of the symbolic significance of these elements of designs as the Persian carpet-knotters are of that of the Buddhist symbols which they use as decorative elements. The intellectual and religious life of the early Turk peoples is far too little known to permit of anything more than surmise in this respect. Moreover, Turkestan has in the last few centuries been less accessible to foreigners that in Marco Polo's day.

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The Turkoman rugs of the best period are so closely knotted that they must from a technical point of view be classed among the best Oriental carpets. Really good rugs

* [see cat. 116, p. 71 -- Analyse]

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2 [see cat. 116, p. 78 -- Analyse]

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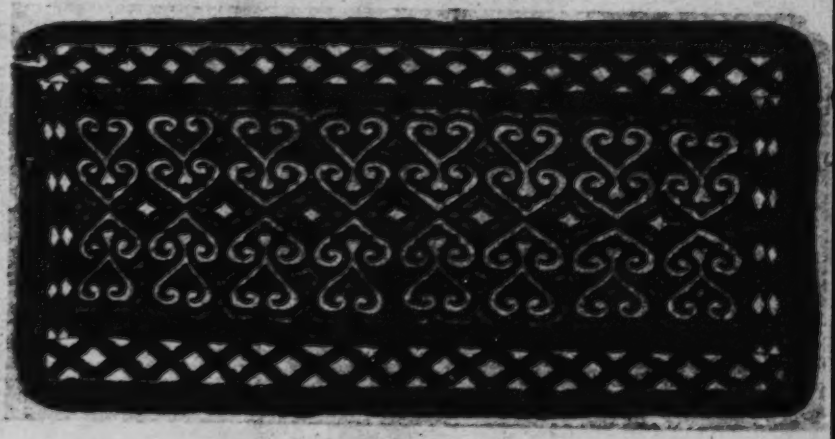
Felt rug from Eastern Turkestan with the rounded ornaments popular in that area.



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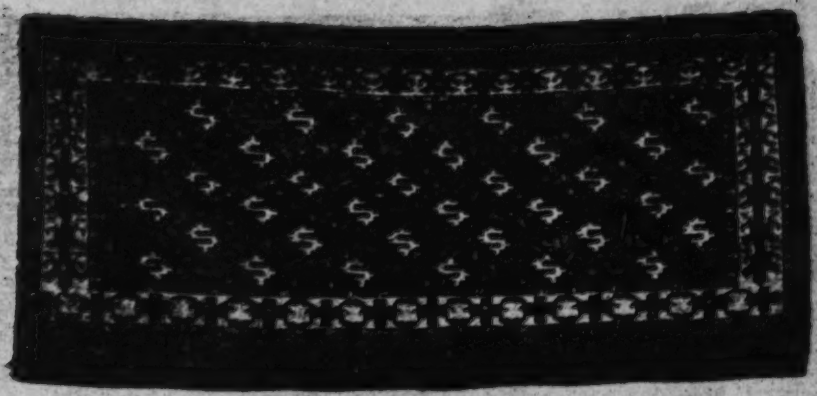

A "torba" or small camel-bag as used by the Turkomans. An early example, the pattern of which is knotted. Privately owned. New York.

287 number from 420 to 450 knots to the square inch, and some times even more than that. The knot is usually the Persian Sennah knot; the Turkish Ghiordes knot occurs in exceptional cases only (cf. Ciba Review No. 15). The material used is the wool of camels, sheep, and goats. The strong knee-hair of the camel serves as material for the warp-threads. For the knot-thread the soft under-wool which goats and camels grow in the cold season is used. Unlike the camels of other Oriental countries the heavy beasts of burden in Turkestan, the so-called Bactrian camels, have an exceedingly thick coat of hair, which covers their bodies in thick tufts during the winter months. Cotton is never used in the making of Turkoman rugs, and silk only very rarely, usually in making small knotted bags from the region of Merv and Punjdeh, and then only for a few details of the pattern.

The treatment of the wool used in knotting rugs has been brought to great perfection in the course of a long tradition. Washing, which is done in running water, is of great importance. It is very difficult to remove all the grease from the fibre, and if that is not done there is danger of maggots finding their way into the pile and destroying it.

386 The same care and skill are devoted to the dyeing of the wool. As elsewhere in the East the important red dye was extracted from the root of the madder-plant (known in the vernacular as rujan) or from the kermes shield-louse. Madder grew wild throughout Turkestan, and

386 was also cultivated. Blue was achieved by means of indigo, which had to be brought from India, and for that reason it is rarely found in Turkoman rugs. Black was usually extracted from the gall-nuts of the pistachio (known as busgunch) and from pomegranate skins. Sometimes mate-

● 287 *Pattern in knot-technique as used by the Yomud Turkomans. Lozenges and rows of hooks are distributed over the background.*

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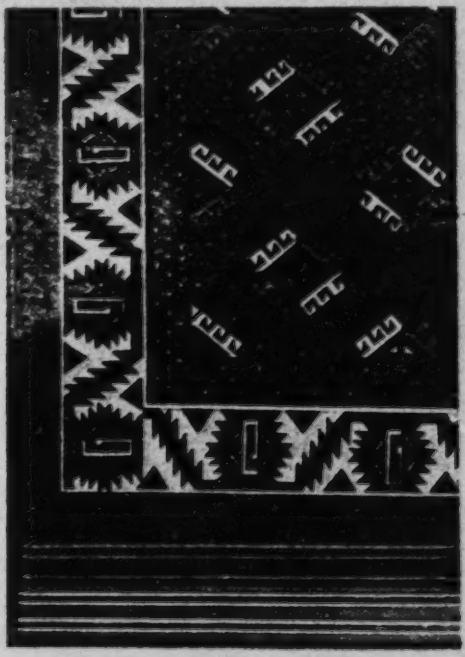

4:Leix U-5 (no date)1941 RL1 Turkestan RL1

386 rials such as pyrites were used, which had the effect of corroding the wool, so that the black parts of many otherwise good rugs give the impression of having been eaten away. In spite of the limited selection of colours the shades and the number of combinations are surprisingly varied. The Turkomans are good observers, and were not slow in making use of the fact that the colours varied with the time of the year at which the plants were gathered, or with the length of time during which they were allowed to boil, to ferment, or to be exposed to the rays of the sun. For that reason the simplicity which characterizes these rugs is never monotonous. Both technically and artistically they are the perfect expression of that form of life which ethnologists describe as nomadic. They fulfil all the requirements of daily use, and the patterns are designed and perpetuated by skilled workers of a tribe, whose members all live under precisely the same geographical and social conditions.

287 531

287 352 These connections between the knotting technique and nomad life are so striking that one feels tempted to regard the craft as an invention of wandering tribes. For the town-dwellers of Persia and India, of Egypt and Asia Minor, who developed the craft of carpet-knotting into an art, the necessity to use such light and easily transportable «textile furniture» is not nearly so great, and it is but natural that they should have adopted the

287 technique primarily for the making of floor-
352 coverings. The fact that Sir Aurel Stein discovered fragments of pile rugs during his excavations of the stations along the ancient silk road through Eastern Turkestan, distinctly points to the origin of the technique among the nomads of Central Asia. Apart from that, nothing certain is known of the origin and development of the different kinds of Turkoman rugs. Some examples may date back to the early eighteenth century. That is, however, no more than surmise, probable though
287 it may be. The one established fact is that all
178 the good examples of the craft now in existence must have been made before the seventies of the last century, that is to say, before the conquest of the country by the Russians. The reason for this is the complete transformation of the life of the Turkoman tribes under Russian rule. As the Russians put an end to the activities of the Turkomans as caravan robbers and slave traders, they were obliged to cast about for some other means of livelihood. From that time on the burden of providing a substitute for the gains formerly achieved by robbery fell to the women, whose skill in carpet-knotting was exploited. Carpets of huge size were made for the palaces of Russian nobles and generals. In time the desire to execute these profitable orders as speedily as possible led to a decline in the great care formerly exercised in the making of Turkoman rugs.